

CONNECTIONS

Putting knowledge to work for the state

From rural fields to urban streets, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is involved in the daily lives and futures of Nebraskans.

Working statewide, NU Cooperative Extension offers educational programs to aid Nebraskans in making decisions and choices that affect their lives and their communities.

Extension programs provide practical education in five priority areas that address critical economic, social and environmental issues Nebraskans face — agricultural profitability and sustainability; children, youth and families; food safety, health and wellness; community and leadership development; and water quality and environment.

Part of — and partners with — Nebraska communities, NU Cooperative Extension puts knowledge to work developing and delivering educational programs for rural and urban individuals, families, businesses and communities. Here's a sampling of the diverse and valuable ways NU Cooperative Extension programs benefit the state.

To learn more about NU Cooperative Extension and what it offers you, we invite you to visit extension's Web site at <http://extension.unl.edu>. Or call or stop by your nearest NU Cooperative Extension office.

**Ebert Dickey, Interim Dean and Director
University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension**

More than 500 participate in juvenile diversion program

NU Cooperative Extension's Juvenile Diversion program helps strengthen the life skills of young offenders, and increase the likelihood they will not reappear in court.

More than 500 Nebraska youth have participated in Cooperative Extension's Juvenile Diversion program in the last seven years as an alternative to the conventional court system.

The program involves youth and a parent or guardian in an educational program focusing on helping the youth understand why the crime committed

was inappropriate and not to be repeated. Program content typically focuses on character education, youth leadership, mentoring, and tobacco, alcohol and drug prevention. Communications skills are emphasized, including parent-child communication. Such issues as conflict resolution also are discussed.

The program has saved more than \$202,000 in Gage and York counties, just two of the counties in which the program is conducted. One study indicates that participants in these programs are 30 percent less likely to be repeat offenders.



Beatrice Police Chief Bruce Lang works with Gage County Extension Educator and Program Director Dianne Swanson on the Cooperative Extension Juvenile Diversion program in Gage County. The educational program focuses on helping youth understand why the crime committed was inappropriate and not to be repeated.

Panhandle grows that green, green grass of home

That Kentucky Bluegrass or fescue carefully seeded for home lawns represents a new alternative crop for Nebraska's Panhandle.

University of Nebraska research and Cooperative Extension efforts are helping farmers establish a grass seed industry. Forage and turf grass seed production offers Panhandle producers a new crop and marketing option to help them diversify their operations. Recently University of Nebraska faculty honed management procedures for producing excellent yields of high quality turf and forage grass seed under irrigation. NU Cooperative Extension works with growers and provides educational sessions to deliver these research findings to interested producers.

Grass seed production has jumped in the past few years and 1,500 acres of seed were harvested in 1999. It's estimated turf grass seed production now contributes at least \$1 million annually to the region's economy.

Food for thought

NU Cooperative Extension nutrition programs reach a broad spectrum of Nebraska residents, from refugee families in Lincoln to longtime Nebraskans in rural areas.

Extension helps low-resource audiences improve how they budget, shop and what they eat, which boosts their self-sufficiency.

In the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 1999, over 30,000 individuals and over 6,300 youth participated in these programs.

One learner credited her participation in extension nutrition programs and a family management class with helping her handle single parenthood and a full-time job that led her to self-sufficiency.

Meaty home study course provides latest beef information

Nebraska is second nationally in cattle and calf production.

Beef Cow Basics, an NU Cooperative Extension home study course, lets cattle producers learn the latest beef nutrition, health care, marketing and food safety information at home on their own schedules.

The program, first offered in 1993, has been so successful that several other states have patterned their beef and sheep

programs after it.

In a survey of 165 participants, more than 90 percent of respondents said they'd make management changes because of the course.

"I've seen a lot of changes in the ranching business and I believe that keeping abreast of the new technologies, as well as being refreshed in the basics, is just as important in the ranching business as it is in any other occupation," a third-generation rancher said.

Another participant reported cutting calf sickness in half by changing his operation's feeding and health program based on course information.

More than 4,500 home study course packets have been distributed to producers from more than 40 states, Bosnia, Mexico and Brazil. Organizers estimate this course saves producers about \$15 per head. That's a production savings for all participants of more than \$6 million, based on the number of cattle involved.



Organizers of NU Cooperative Extension's *Beef Cow Basics* home study course estimate the course saves producers about \$15 per head.

Character Counts! helps children sort right from wrong

Recent studies show character development is critical to fostering children's overall sense of well-being. An NU Cooperative Extension program helps children sort right from wrong and encourages them to use universally accepted values to strengthen their character.

Character Counts! teaches values through education, hands-on experience, and a common language. More than 80 percent of the teachers and facilitators who use the program report an overall positive experience in the children they teach. Behavior changes include children being more helpful to others, more

truthful and less likely to blame others.

The program also influences adults—75 percent of teachers and facilitators responding to a survey said they changed their own behavior as a result of the training.

Character Counts! began in Nebraska in 1996, and in the first four years 1,900 Nebraska youth and adults were trained to teach *Character Counts!* and 31,000 children received 15 hours of *Character Counts!* educational programming in their classrooms. The curriculum reached another 128,000 children through one-time exposure at day camps, the Nebraska State Fair and civic groups.

Program offers new ways to build family friendly communities

NU Cooperative Extension is offering new ways to reach Native American people in northeast Nebraska, thanks to a Building Family Friendly Communities program.

Activities include a teen improvisational theater troupe, a park landscape improvement project, computer lab access and computer training, teen peer mediation program, environmental school projects, and leadership programs for youth and adults.

In the improvisational theater troupe

alone, more than 25 Native American teens have performed scenes about social issues affecting youth and families throughout the state and nationally. Of the teens surveyed who participated in these activities, more than half now see themselves as a positive role model, compared to less than one-fourth prior to the activities.

More than half now have personal goals and nearly half have found ways to save time and energy by planning ahead.

Training helps processors meet federal mandate

Meat processors are getting help from NU Cooperative Extension to assure the quality and safety of meat and poultry products.

As the nation's leader in commercial slaughter, Nebraska's reputation and economic well-being are closely tied to quality meat products.

NU Cooperative Extension works with the state's poultry and meat industries on training to assure the quality and safety of Nebraska's meat products. During 1999, extension and these industries teamed to incorporate Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) training into existing programs to help many of Nebraska's smallest processors meet the federal mandate for adopting the new standards.

NU food safety specialists developed a multi-lingual training video, which was distributed to more than 3,500 companies



NU Cooperative Extension Meat Specialist Dennis Burson and Food Safety Specialist Mindy Brashears work with the state's poultry and meat industries to incorporate Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) training into existing programs to help processors meet new federal standards.

in the United States and Puerto Rico. Using the video saved each firm as much as \$1,000 in training fees.

During the past eight years, extension specialists presented workshops to more than 612 small- to medium-sized Nebraska and Kansas firms, and consulted with more than 170 companies to help them comply with the new federal regulations.

Skills training helps people get on with life

For people transitioning from welfare to work, economic self-sufficiency takes more than getting a job.

In 1999, NU Cooperative Extension collaborated with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services to develop an educational program that teaches life skills to recipients as they begin working. A single mother from Lincoln County credits the Building Nebraska Families program with helping her learn to budget, make more informed spending choices and improve her attitude toward work. She plans to earn a degree and get a higher-paying job to secure a better future for her son.

Saving water saves money

Splash, an NU Cooperative Extension water management program coupled with state and federal entities, helped 165 Central Platte Valley irrigators reduce their water use by about 44.6 million gallons each year. That's a total of 7.4 billion gallons over the five-year life of the project — enough water in the last five years to fill a train of tanker cars 2,675 miles long.

The program taught farmers how to cut water waste, use less power and prevent fertilizer from leaching into the groundwater. Since 1994, these producers applied these principles to more than 60,000 acres. They saved about \$9.40 per acre, for a total of \$575,000. More than 1 million pounds of nitrogen, worth about \$148,000, was kept from leaching into the groundwater.

Managing Irrigation Systems for Today and Tomorrow, a follow-up program, began in 1999 to target chronically high groundwater nitrate areas in the region.

Diagnostic clinics help ag producers keep up

Agricultural production is becoming more sophisticated, with new technologies to master and increasingly more complex weed, disease and pest control decisions. NU Cooperative Extension diagnostic clinics help farmers, crop consultants and other ag business professionals stay abreast of changes.

NU Cooperative Extension recently teamed with three other states to offer a sugar beet crop management workshop in western Nebraska. Participants estimate value of knowledge gained at this session at \$45 per acre, or about \$7 million based on the 200,000 acres represented by the participants.

In eastern Nebraska, nearly 380 agribusiness professionals participated in the 1999 summer field diagnostic clinics. Participants estimated the clinics' value at \$11 per acre, or more than \$43 million total on the 4 million acres they manage. That represents nearly a quarter of Nebraska's crop acres.

Jobs well done

Creating jobs is key to growing and sustaining Nebraska's small communities.

An NU Cooperative Extension program helps rural and small-town residents start or expand small businesses. The Nebraska EDGE (Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs) training includes a nine-week feasibility study, 10-week agricultural and 12-week business plan development courses.

Since the program began in 1993, EDGE participants have created more than 500 full-time jobs in small towns around Nebraska. A 1999 participant said the EDGE program "... kept us from closing our doors."

Joint efforts aim to reduce threat to drinking water

Herbicide runoff from fields in the Blue River Basin area of Nebraska and Kansas can hurt drinking water quality downstream in Kansas. Joint research and extension education efforts by the University of Nebraska and Kansas State University aim to reduce the threats to drinking water.

Using a computer model and four years of atrazine runoff data, Nebraska faculty are identifying the most promising herbicide management and tillage practices for reducing herbicide runoff from farm fields. Early results indicate several tillage and herbicide management practices potentially could cut average annual atrazine runoff by 50 percent or more.

Findings provide the framework for NU Cooperative Extension efforts to encourage farmers to increase proven best management practices to reduce the potential for atrazine and sediment runoff.



Reducing threats to drinking water is the goal of joint research and extension efforts by the University of Nebraska and Kansas State University.

Good for the birds is good for the Panhandle economy

To create a value-added market for several alternative crops and aid community economic development, University of Nebraska faculty worked with Cheyenne County to attract Pennington Seed Co., a grass and birdseed company, to Sidney, Neb.

Earlier NU Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources research led to proso millet, sunflower and safflower varieties that perform well in the region and laid the foundation for expanded birdseed production.

In addition to crop development and feasibility studies, IANR research and

extension staff met with seed company owners and provided Cheyenne County economic development staff with information on these crops and the region's ability to produce them.

Since the Pennington Seed Co. Plant opened in the mid-1990s, Panhandle birdseed production has increased by about 100,000 acres, which translates into a new market worth \$10 million annually. These new crops help Panhandle farmers diversify their crop base. The new plan also provides jobs and other economic benefits to the community.

Partners with Nebraska

Land-grant universities work with the people they serve. NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources does so in priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people and communities. We teach, discover new knowledge through research, and extend that new, unbiased information across the state and beyond through extension.



University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension is part of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

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